



TLA-O-QUI-AHT - YUULU?I?ATH - DISTRICT OF UCLUELET - DISTRICT OF TOFINO

THE SUCCESS OF THE WEST COAST N.E.S.T. (NATURE. EDUCATION. SUSTAINABILITY. TRANSFORMATION.)



PATHWAY OVERVIEW

Located on the West Coast of Vancouver Island, the District of Tofino, Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation communities, District of Ucluelet, and Yuułu?i?ath Government have seen years of conventional tourism, which has exceeded the sustainable capacity of the region. In order to build a new path forward, these four governments have worked on supporting a knowledge-based economy, allowing each community to profile its strengths, education, and skills training in order to provide sustainable and diverse growth for the region alongside attracting tourism-based visitors. Through the development of the West Coast Nature, Education, Sustainability, Transformation (N.E.S.T.) program, these partners, with support from the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust (CBT), have created an incredibly successful collective that provides training and capacity building, culturally grounded education opportunities, and job opportunities for the region.

PATHWAY ACTIVITIES

The collaborative pathway activities undertaken by the District of Tofino, Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation communities, District of Ucluelet, and Yuułu?i?ath Government include the following.



Protocol and Communications Agreements



Joint Economic Development Initiatives



Shared Tourism Projects

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Years of conventional tourism along the West Coast of Vancouver Island has resulted in seasonal employment and lower average incomes, increased housing costs for locals, seasonal demand on emergency services, and a summer water shortage for the region. In all, this has exceeded the sustainable capacity of region.

At a turning point, the District of Tofino, Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation communities, District of Ucluelet, and Yuułu?i?ath Government set out to seek a new path forward. Seeing an opportunity in attracting a different kind of tourist, the communities worked together on developing the foundation

for a knowledge-based economy. The idea was that each community could promote, profile, and honour unique attributes of each community, support advanced education, and enable increased skills training with more meaningful and stable employment for residents.

In 2011, the District of Tofino, Tla-o-qui-aht First Nations, District of Ucluelet, and Yuułu?i?ath Government came together as a regional working group to look at how they could diversify and move towards an education-based tourism economy on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. This resulted in the first regional Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

in 2013 – initially called the *Regional Higher Learning Initiative*, that outlined the partners' interest in shifting from conventional tourism to education tourism, and to put the region on the map as a key education destination.

The MOU was a foundational piece for the working group. It organized the group's working relationship and outlined the principles of how they would operate and how they would communicate with each other. It was developed collaboratively and grounded in mutual respect. During the development, group members agreed they wouldn't have a meeting if someone couldn't make it, unless absentees gave permission to move ahead without them. Meeting locations were also rotated through each of the communities. These simple principles provided the basis that built trust and strong relationships.

The group collaborated with local organizations, educational institutions, and government agencies to identify community education needs and priorities. Through this exploration, additional partnerships were formed throughout the region. Once the concept was well established, funds within the region were leveraged to support three studies in 2014: an education asset inventory, research on the feasibility of education tourism as an approach to build local learning capacity, and a visitor market demand analysis for place-based education. These studies included four researchers from Royal Roads University, who brought their knowledge and expertise to the project.

The outcome of these initial studies resulted in the outline for a new direction which, once completed, allowed the working group to partner with the Westcoast Aquatic Management Association (WAMA) and Clayoquot Biosphere Trust (CBT) to secure additional funding. With this research and support, the West Coast N.E.S.T. was

launched in 2016 as a collective network that represents, provides marketing for, and connects local and visiting people to learning opportunities offered throughout the region.

With 2017 funding from B.C. Rural Dividend Program, Tourism Tofino and Tourism Ucluelet, they've developed a marketing tool and one full time education coordinator. Hiring of an education coordinator has helped to bring in and support additional programming, and with registration fees supporting the programming alongside additional endowment funding, N.E.S.T. is expected to progress positively.

N.E.S.T. is now run by the CBT as an umbrella organization that helps to deliver programming and coordinate with partner organizations and businesses. Although there is still a relationship, Tofino and Ucluelet are no longer formally or directly involved but still continue to invest in and support the program. Additionally, municipalities have now integrated N.E.S.T. into their economic development plans.

OUTCOMES

Embedded in Nuuchahnulth values of *lisaak* (living respectfully), *Qwa'aak qin teechmis* (life in the balance) and *Hishuk ish ts'awalk* (everything is one and interconnected), N.E.S.T. focuses on the following four sectors of educational tourism and life-long learning:

- University field school;
- Professional development courses;
- Adult learning, and;
- Youth learning.

To date, West Coast N.E.S.T. has seen good success and is still growing. While still in its initial operational stages, it is building long-term economic resilience for the region and is improving the lives of local youth, families, and businesses within each community. In 2018, the N.E.S.T. has:

“Be mindful to not invite partners into your process, instead offer an invitation to participate in an initiative or idea, and determine together what the process is going to be.”

Mayor Josie Osborne, District of Tofino



- Listed and supported 94 courses and 572 education events
- Hosted four major education tourism programs attended by over 1,000 people
- Provided six capacity-building initiatives for local organizations and businesses
- Supported over 1,300 jobs directly and indirectly
- Created activities and employment during off-season and shoulder seasons
- Created a 52% growth in website traffic
- Graduated over 40 students, from Nuuchahnulth and non-Nuuchahnulth communities, from the Leadership Vancouver Island Training program
- Helped to establish a high school training program which has created opportunities for indigenous and non-indigenous youth to stay in the region for work and gain skills in the tourism industry as instructors, guides, etc.

N.E.S.T. has provided shared benefits, support, and networking opportunities between communities and local businesses in the region outside of the direct programming offered. Recently the N.E.S.T. knitters retreat program featured workshops with notable local knitters and weavers and also includes events with local organizations, such as Wild Pacific Trail, and group dinners at local restaurants. Additionally, it has begun to influence the approach of Tourism Tofino, which has started to work with N.E.S.T., using their messaging to promote education tourism.

Promoting a culture of learning and collaborative problem solving, N.E.S.T. provides unique learning opportunities for visitors while also offering skill building, educational, and employment opportunities for local residents. In the process, it shifts from conventional consumer tourism to a more respectful, inquisitive and knowledge seeking, tourist who seeks to stay for longer periods of time, learn from local communities, experience local culture and in the long term, contribute to stewardship of an ecologically significant place.

LESSONS LEARNED AND KEYS TO SUCCESS

A core lesson learned in the process of developing the N.E.S.T. program was that education is intrinsic to the success and development of community building. Through innovation and embracing the collaborative potential behind all of these communities' knowledge-based resources, the N.E.S.T. program continues to thrive. Other lessons and keys to success include:

- ✓ **Find common ground.** Gain an understanding of each community's strengths and challenges in order to determine how to share and build partnership.
- ✓ **Be mindful of protocol.** Ensure that each community understands protocol. Recognize the needs and capacities of participation and work within them to fill in gaps and provide the support where needed.
- ✓ **Be patient and track success.** Record big wins, track numbers, and gain an understanding of how well your program is doing. These things take time and recording wins helps to encourage momentum.
- ✓ **Decentralize meetings.** Rotate meetings within partner communities in order to share the responsibility and burden of travel.
- ✓ **Marketing is challenging.** It's important to be persistent and patient with the success of marketing.
- ✓ **Shared principles.** Establish principles for working together collaboratively in order to consider the differences in styles of communication and problem solving.



PHOTO: Students show their cedar weavings from courses offered by Weaver Rose Wilson from Yuułu?i?ath First Nation, programming supported by the N.E.S.T. Photo by West Coast N.E.S.T.

“By developing education and capacity-building programs for local and visiting learners, N.E.S.T. is supporting the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust’s mission to facilitate the exchange of knowledge locally and globally. We’re connecting people across disciplines, cultures and boundaries.”

*Rebecca Hurwitz, Executive Director
of the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust*



Photo: N.E.S.T. worked with Yamagawa University to plan a series of workshops led by local educators and knowledge holders to learn about forests and forest management in the region.
Photo by West Coast N.E.S.T.

PATHWAYS TO COLLABORATION

Pathways to Collaboration is a joint initiative of the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM), the Province of British Columbia, and the First Nations Summit with funding from the Indigenous Business & Investment Council (IBIC). The project aims to showcase the growing number of successful economic development collaborations and partnerships between First Nations and local governments, while highlighting lessons learned and key steps to success.

The pathways to collaboration communities take are unique, reflecting the context of the communities involved, and involve different activities. Common pathway activities include protocol and communications agreements; servicing agreements and shared infrastructure projects; collaborative land use planning and development projects; joint economic development initiatives; and shared tourism projects. Like signposts along a pathway, these pathway activities are identified in the case study series.

For more information on the project, please contact the communities profiled, or visit www.ubcm.ca.



**Indigenous Business and
Investment Council**
Sharing Success